

School Readiness

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We will look at:

- What is a child?
- What is 'school readiness'?
- The role of preschools
- What factors predict school success?
- The importance of neuroscience and experience-dependent connectivity
- Will delaying your child's entry to school provide any benefits?
- What can you, as parents, do to help your child be more successful at school?

What is a Child?

A child is characterised by:

- **Dependence on adults**
- **High levels of impulsivity and emotionality**
- **Low levels of responsibility and accountability**

But a children love to learn and have a strong drive for mastery. Our aim is to help our children move towards independence and adulthood as they are programmed to do

What is 'school readiness'?

School readiness has traditionally been thought of as a simple outcome of chronological age and biological progress in a child

Now this view of school readiness has been shown to be too limited. Readiness is now seen as the result of the interaction of the child's individual characteristics, their biological progress and their learning experiences

What are the components of 'school readiness?

- Physical aspects
- Cognitive aspects
- Communication aspects
- Social aspects
- Emotional aspects (*including adaptivity ie the capacity to cope resiliently with changes*)

So which children might be considered 'not ready?

Children who (for example):

- still have significant difficulties with wetting or soiling (*but this may be a medical or learning issue and can be identified and supported when they are younger*)
- haven't been to pre-school
- have ongoing difficulties separating from their parents (*but this can be identified and supported when they are younger*)
- have experienced significant and recent trauma or neglect (*but they can be helped with this through appropriate professional support*)

School Entry is a Significant Transition

- Changed adult-child ratio
- Larger physical area to navigate
- Greater diversity and a larger number of children to respond to
- More rules & routines
- More structured learning (but still lots of opportunities to move and play)

The Role of Pre-schools

Research strongly confirms that having at least one year of pre-school is really important for preparing children for school!

What factors predict school success?

The factors that appear to most effectively predict school success are:

- Cognitive ability (*ie how well they think and learn*)
- Social skills
- Emotional management and adaptivity

But one can compensate for the other

What factors predict school success?

For example:

Most children with high academic ability
but poor social skills will still achieve well

AND

Most children with average ability and
good social skills will still achieve well

The importance of experience-dependent connectivity

Research in *Developmental Neuroscience* tells us that the maturational processes result in young children having an overproduction of neurons at various times

Early experiences are needed to maintain, strengthen and connect those neurons with each other or many of them will atrophy and disappear

Providing young children with many opportunities to learn and take on challenges helps them to keep and connect more neurons and develop more effective thinking and learning processes

The importance of experience-dependent connectivity

Principle One: Use it or lose it

Principle Two: Use it & improve it

The BIG Question?

Will delaying your child's entry to school provide any benefits?

The BIG Question

There are a lot of contradictory and unclear research outcomes and no simple answers

The BIG Question!

There are some inconsistent outcomes from research studies but the conclusion from current research studies is:

Most children gain no benefit from repeating a year of pre-school or delaying their entry to school in other ways and for some children there are actually negative outcomes for delaying school entry

Current School Entry Ages

STATE	ENTRY CRITERIA	AGE RANGE
VIC & ACT	Turn 5 before April 30	4.9 to 5.9
NSW	Turn 5 before July 31	4.6 to 5.6
WA	Turn 5 before June 30	4.7 to 5.7
SA	Continuous intake after turning 5	4.7 to 5.7
NT	Must turn 4.6 by Jan 1	4.6 to 5.6
QLD	Turn 5 before Dec 31	5 to 6
TAS	Turn 5 before Jan 1	5.1 to 6.1

Although different states (and countries) have different cut-off points during the year, many parents in all states (especially those with high educational levels and income) still consider delaying their child's entry to primary school even though they are age-eligible.

WHY?

- Their child may be younger than the other children with whom they will enter Prep and their parents are concerned that they might not cope
- There may be one or more aspects of their functioning which is still relatively immature (but ALL children have uneven development)
- They want to give their child an advantage
- It is part of a trend towards parents' overprotecting their children by 'lowering the bar'
- Peer pressure from other parents

Delayed entry occurs most often in Victoria and NSW ie those states that have had the weakest links between the primary school and pre-school systems

How do preschool teachers decide on 'school readiness'?

Research studies (eg McBryde et al., 2004) suggest that most do NOT decide on the basis of developmental status but on the basis of:

- Chronological age (*recommending that younger students delay school entry*)
- Gender (*boys are nearly twice as likely to be assessed as less 'ready'*)
- Comparatively poor social skills (*especially shyness*)
- Emotionality (*especially anxiety*)

How do parents decide on 'school readiness'?

Research studies suggest that parents decide mostly on the basis of:

- Chronological age
- Pre-school teachers' recommendations
(often made 11 months or more before children are eligible for school entry)
- Shyness

How good are their predictions of school success?

POOR!

This is even true even when they are using standardised assessment instruments

Social skills ARE important

For example:

- Sharing and taking turns
- Acting responsibly
- Interacting with peers in a positive and cooperative
- Saying what they want or how they feel

BUT.....

What if your child's 'shyness' isn't about social skills but is actually a temperamental trait that may be ongoing to some degree?

Being able to sit still, concentrate and persist is also important BUT..

What if your child's difficulty with doing this is a temperamental trait that may moderate over time but may also be ongoing to some degree?

Traits identified in the Australian Temperament Project

- Activity level
- Persistence
- Inhibition
- Reactivity/Emotionality
- Mood (predominantly negative or positive)
- Sociability

Delayed School Entry: The Positives

Children whose school entry was delayed:

- Have better academic performance in Prep and Year One (and, in some studies, also in Year Two)
- Are less likely to receive direct and indirect negative feedback from teachers about their schoolwork
- Have a slightly higher likelihood of taking on leadership roles in secondary school

Delayed School Entry: The Negatives

- There appear to be no long term advantages for children whose school entry is delayed. The early academic differences have mostly disappeared by the end of Year 2 or Year 3
- There don't appear to be any lasting advantages in terms of popularity or self confidence either
- Delayed entry boys have a moderately higher likelihood of behavioural problems in upper primary school and secondary school
- Perhaps...Puberty in Years 5 or 6? They can legally leave school at 16 (ie during Year 9). Drinking and driving in year 11 ?

Exempl: Spitzer, Cupp and Parke, 1995

No differences were found between the social acceptance and self-perceptions of students whose entry to school was delayed and those who were enrolled when age-eligible. A few initial social difficulties were identified in the youngest students but these had disappeared by the end of the year

There were also no differences in self-reported school adjustment, loneliness, perceptions of competence, or acceptance related to school entry age.

Australian Study (WA , 1995)

There were no differences in Year 12 results or university aspirations between younger and older age-eligible children who entered in the first year of primary school. In other words the month of their birthday had no impact.

Australian Study (WA , 1995)

However:

Students who were older in Year 12 because their entry to school had been delayed had poorer academic results in Year 12 and were less likely to aspire to a university education than students who had entered when they were age-eligible.

Helping children to develop
the foundations for school
success

What you can do to help your child be more successful

- Develop their curiosity
- Teach and offer positive feedback for using social skills such as sharing, taking turns, showing kindness etc
- Develop their resilience and set challenges
- Teach them to name and manage their feelings
- Read books with them
- Encourage them to count and find similarities at every opportunity
- Have fun with magnetic letters and simple treasure hunts
- Avoid the **PARENTAL HAPPINESS TRAP!**

The Happiness Trap

Research suggests that a great many parents have fallen into the **HAPPINESS TRAP** and, in doing so, have unintentionally contributed to lower levels of resilience in their children.

New Terms

- Bubble Wrap generation
- Cottonwool kids
- Helicopter parents
- Overprotective parenting

The Happiness Trap contributes to

- Overprotective parenting
- Parents trying to solve their child's 'normal' problems
- Quick 'fixes' for negative emotions eg junk food, letting children stay home from school
- Looser boundaries
- A sense of entitlement

The Happiness Trap contributes to

- Overprotective parenting and trying to ensure that children are always 'happy' and don't have any 'bad' feelings
- Parents trying to solve their child's 'normal' problems
- Quick 'fixes' for negative emotions eg junk food, letting children stay home from school
- 'Lowering the bar' rather than encouraging children to develop the skills and attitudes required to 'get over the bar'
- Looser behavioural boundaries
- Children having a sense of entitlement

What is Resilience?

Human resilience is the capacity to cope well with times of adversity or hardship (and even be strengthened by them). It is the ability to bounce back from difficult times to a fulfilling life while retaining a positive sense of self.

Resilience

Help your child understand and accept that life can be difficult, disappointing and sad at times and that this is normal

Build a resilient family

Build a resilient family environment and cope, as a family, by pulling together optimistically in the face of family challenges. Make sure the parental 'executive' is united.

Help them to learn to manage their feelings by using this Emotional Literacy Script

1. Name their feeling (*you seem worried*)
2. Understand it (*I can understand why you feel like that*)
3. Help them to problem solve how they might deal with the feeling and/or solve the problem (*but within limits*)
4. Take an optimistic approach (*we can work this out together*)